

THE NEW CHAPTER

ON

THE SUBJECT OF SLAVERY.

BY

I

REV. R. A. ARTHUR,

OF THE WESTERN VIRGINIA CONFERENCE.



CINCINNATI:

PRINTED AT THE METHODIST BOOK CONCERN.

R. P. THOMPSON, PRINTER.

1860.

Nov 05 2001

Special Collections / Antislavery

Anti-
Slavery
E
438
.A76
1860

THE NEW CHAPTER.

As there has been some action in Charleston station in regard to the new chapter upon the subject of slavery, and resolutions passed, in which I and several members of this charge do not concur, I deem it proper that my interpretation and understanding of this chapter should now be more fully understood.

I shall consider this subject with all candor, and in view of my responsibility to the Searcher of all hearts. And I feel confident that all who carefully, dispassionately peruse the following pages will find that there is but little, if any, difference between us in regard to the subject under consideration.

THE OLD CHAPTER AND PROVISIO.

“QUESTION. What shall be done for the extirpation of the evil of slavery?

“*Answer* 1. We declare that we are as much as ever convinced of the great evil of slavery: therefore no slaveholder shall be eligible to any official station in our Church hereafter, where the laws of the state in which he lives will admit of emancipation, and permit the liberated slave to enjoy freedom.

“2. When any traveling preacher becomes an owner of a slave or slaves, by any means, he shall forfeit his ministerial character in our Church, unless he execute, if it be practicable, a legal emancipation of such slaves, conformably to the laws of the state in which he lives.

“3. All our preachers shall prudently enforce upon our members the necessity of teaching their slaves to read the word of God; and to allow them time to attend upon the public worship of God on regular days of Divine service.”

And in the section in regard to local preachers it is said, “*Provided*, nevertheless, no slaveholder shall be eligible to the

office of an elder or deacon, where the laws will admit of emancipation, and permit the liberated slave to enjoy freedom."

This chapter and proviso have respect to slaveholding. Now, what are the facts in the case? They are these: Remove the legal disabilities attending emancipation, and *slaveholding* becomes at once degrading to official members and ministers; members are rendered ineligible to official stations as leaders, stewards, etc.; ordination refused to local preachers, and the ministerial character of traveling preachers is *forfeited* and *destroyed*. But this whole chapter and proviso have been stricken out of the Discipline, and a new chapter has been inserted in the stead thereof.

THE NEW CHAPTER.

"QUESTION. What shall be done for the extirpation of the evil of slavery?"

"ANSWER. We declare that we are as much as ever convinced of the great evil of slavery. We believe that the buying, selling, or holding of human beings, *to be used as chattels*, is contrary to the laws of God and nature, and inconsistent with the Golden Rule, and with that rule in our Discipline which requires all who desire to continue among us to 'do no harm,' and to 'avoid evil of every kind.' We therefore affectionately admonish all our preachers and people to keep themselves pure from this great evil, and to seek its extirpation by all lawful and Christian means."

But what is the nature and import of this chapter? What was the meaning attached to it by the General conference? These questions I will endeavor to answer.

1. I understand the new chapter to be "declarative and advisory;" merely expressing belief and giving advice; and, therefore, is of no legal or statutory force. It was so declared by the General conference. An amendment was offered by Messrs. Holt and Sargent, designed to be explanatory of this chapter, which was as follows: "*Resolved*, That this section is understood and meant to be only advisory." This having been rejected, the following resolution, explanatory of the above action, was passed by a vote of 175 yeas to 6 nays—39 being absent or present and not voting—"Resolved, That said amendment was rejected by

this body, because we regard the chapter in itself so clearly declarative and advisory as not to require any such explanation." (See Journal of the General Conference, page 261.)

Dr. Kingsley, the distinguished Chairman of the Committee on Slavery, while advocating the new chapter, said, "You may show this to any unprejudiced man in the world, and he will not say it is statutory in the least, and *not one in the majority understood it so*;" "he understood this chapter to be just what it claims to be—a declaration of *sentiment*, and an affectionate *advice*, but *not to be statutory*."

The character of the chapter, therefore, being clearly settled to be merely "*declarative and advisory*," our next inquiry is in regard to its *import*.

What is this declaration of *sentiment*? What is the belief therein asserted? And what is the "*advice*" therein given?

Waiving for the present what I have to say in regard to the "*advice*" given, I shall now examine this belief or declaration of sentiment: "We believe that the buying, selling, or holding of human beings, *to be used as chattels*, is contrary to the laws of God and nature," etc.

Now, in regard to this declaration against "buying or selling" of human beings, there can be no objection urged by any member. The constitutional law of the Church on this subject has *always* been opposed to it. And "*the buying and selling of men, women, and children, with an intention to enslave them*," as this constitutional law or General Rule, substantially, has existed in the Church from its foundation, and has remained unchanged in its present form since 1792, except "and" has been inserted instead of "or," being, no doubt, a typographical error.

But what has been the *interpretation* of this "*buying or selling*?" And what has been the practice of the Church under it? It has *always* been understood as applying to the "indiscriminate traffic" of slavery, and the practice of the Church has been accordingly.

And such I understand to be the interpretation in regard to the "*buying or selling*" in the new chapter, inserted in the form of mere belief, *without* pains or penalties to those who may choose to believe otherwise. There exists, then, no just ground here for repudiation. And it affords me pleasure to add, that, in

regard to this feature of the subject, we have never had any difficulty any where in Western Virginia. The moral sentiment of the community has always been opposed to the indiscriminate traffic of slavery.

But what shall be said respecting the "holding of human beings, *to be used as chattels*?" In regard to this clause there seems to be some difference of opinion. But a careful examination of it will, I doubt not, lead to the same conclusion in regard to its true meaning. The General conference understood it. Let us see if we can not.

Now, take away the *limiting* phrase, "*to be used as chattels*," from this clause and its meaning is at once settled. *All* slaveholding would be declared by the chapter to be "contrary to the laws of God," etc. But the restricting phrase, "*to be used as chattels*," determines the character of the slaveholding referred to in the chapter. Not a word is uttered against the mere *holding* of human beings. It is holding them under a certain *contingency* that is believed to be "contrary to the laws of God," etc. And that contingency is, that they are "*to be used as chattels*;" not that the master has not the legal right of property in his servant, nor that the servant is not to be faithful in his attachment and service to his master—all this is recognized and allowed—but that servants should not be used *merely* as an implement of husbandry, or as a beast of the stall, to be thrown aside at pleasure, but that a proper regard is to be had for their welfare and for their moral and religious improvement.

The apostle's instructions in regard to Onesimus are of the same character. Philemon was to regard him "not now as a servant, [*merely*,] but above a servant, a brother beloved, especially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh, [as a servant,] and in the Lord?" (as a Christian.) It is, therefore, the *abuses* and *mercenary* features that may attend slaveholding that are referred to in the new chapter.

In confirmation of our views I refer to extracts from our own able and distinguished delegates to the General conference.

Dr. W. Hunter says: "*Slaveholding* is not necessarily sinful, but depends for its moral character on circumstances, motives, and purposes. I am happy to say that I did not find a man at the late General conference who denied this position. Even the

form of the new rule proposed, for which the whole majority voted, implied it. It was not *slaveholding* as such, but *slaveholding with a certain purpose* or '*intention*' which is condemned."

Rev. G. Battelle holds the following language in regard to this subject: "It has been broadly and confidently asserted in various forms, through the medium of the press and otherwise, that all slaveholding is by this chapter declared to be a sin; that it effectually creates a new term of membership in our Church. Is this true? So far from it, that in my judgment the new chapter *does not touch the mere act of slaveholding at all*. It neither creates nor attempts to create any new term of membership in our Church. The report of the majority of the Committee on Slavery specifically disclaims the very thing which the quotation above given says the chapter declares. 'We do not affirm,' says the report, 'that the holding of a slave is under all circumstances sinful.' The new chapter says: 'We believe the buying, selling, or holding of human beings, *to be used as chattels*, is contrary to the word of God,' etc. The sentiment here expressed is obviously not against the mere relation of master, but against the holding of human beings, *to be used as chattels*, that is, as *things*; against the using of human beings as the master may use his ox, his horse, his plow, his *chattels*, of whatever kind, which he may use, or abuse, or cast away as his caprice, or avarice, or pleasure may dictate, and without reference to the comfort or wellbeing of the *thing* so used. Unless I have been all my life mistaken, this is the kind of slaveholding—judging from our Discipline and history as a people—to which Methodism has all along stood opposed. It has, in fact, been our constant statement that, though members of our Church held the relation of master, that relation was, under the circumstances, a merciful relation. And though there is a sense in which any slave, however kindly treated, is regarded, in the eye of the civil law, as a chattel, yet we have insisted that our members did not 'hold and use' their servants merely 'as chattels,' or things, or brutes, but with reference both to their present and future good. . . . I have never met in Virginia with the Methodist preacher or member who would undertake to defend the kind of slaveholding which the sentiment of the chapter, as above interpreted, condemns."

Dr. Kingsley, heretofore referred to, confirms the foregoing exposition and extracts in regard to the *chattel feature*. "There may be cases," says he, "where emancipation may be impossible, or where, owing to circumstances beyond the control of the master, emancipation may be evidently a greater injury to the slave than to remain as he is, and where the master, if he were in the slave's stead, would desire to remain in the legal relation of slave; and if these circumstances continue through the natural life of the slave, then the master may be justified in continuing to be the legal owner of such slave; but it is his duty, even under such circumstances, to give unto his servant that which is just and equal. Under these circumstances the master would not hold the slave 'to be used as a chattel,' but from an entirely-different motive."

I deem it unnecessary to add any thing further in regard to the *traffic* and *holding* feature of the chapter. I indulge the hope enough has been said to satisfy every anxious inquirer after the truth.

2. We come now to the "advisory" part of the new chapter. There is no difficulty here. The Thermopylæ has been passed; what remains is easy.

In regard to this *advice* or *admonition* in relation to the extirpation of slavery, it is readily perceived that it is *limited* and *restricted* as to the *means* to be used. They are to be *Christian* and *lawful* means. They are to be the New Testament and the laws of our country. The "advice," then, being *limited* and *restricted* so as to accord with the teachings of the New Testament and the laws of our country, it implies *nothing more* than to carry out the teachings of the apostles, as understood by ourselves, respecting this subject, and that this advice being *so* limited and restricted, it does, and I so understand it, recognize in the relation of master and servant the legal right of property, and, therefore, *repudiates* all interference with the relation of master and servant other than to promote the moral and religious improvement of both. And the Western Virginia conference, touching the same principle, says: "As ministers of the Gospel it always has been, and still is, our *duty* and *business* simply to promote the moral and religious improvement of masters and servants by enforcing the precepts and exhortations of the New

Testament, which prescribes their duties and obligations. 'Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honor, that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed,' etc. (See Pastoral Address, Minutes Western Virginia Conference for 1860.)

I have now given what I consider to be the nature and import of this chapter as understood by the General conference, the law-making power; and I doubt not it is the interpretation our conference will give it. Rev. G. Battelle says, "In view of the known sentiments of the preachers and people to whom alone this chapter is confided, is there a man among us who supposes that there is a shadow of probability that a single member of our Church will ever be subject to either Church arraignment, trial, penalty, or any disability whatever, by the force of this new chapter? *Is it even possible* that under it any Church process can be rightfully instituted that will put a single slaveholder out of the Church, or prevent one from coming in? No one will say this can be done."

How, then, does this new chapter, as above interpreted, compare with the old one? The old chapter was of *legal*, of *statutory* force; it was *law*, with pains and penalties attached to it. The new chapter is *not* law; it is "declarative and advisory;" no one being forced *even* to believe the *sentiment* or carry out the *advice*. It is left to each to adjust it for himself between his own conscience and his God.

Dr. Drummond, the able Chairman of the Committee on Law Questions, at the last General conference, in referring to the legal feature of the chapter, in a private letter, says, "I shall live, and die, and go to my final account with just as clear and as firm a conviction that there is no *law* in that chapter, nor even the resemblance of a law, as I have that two and two make four."

And, therefore, as Rev. G. Battelle says, "the book of Discipline is really less objectionable in the south than before."

THE NEW CHAPTER NO NEW DOCTRINE.

The principles asserted in the new chapter, and as above explained, are not new. They have always existed in the Church; and the chapter is but the embodiment of these principles. For

confirmation of this statement I refer my readers to our standard authorities—Wesley, Clarke, Benson, Watson, Coke, Asbury, Dr. Bangs, etc.—and to the “History of the Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church, by Robert Emory.”

THE QUESTION SETTLED.

The slavery question in its relation to the Church may be regarded as settled. The General conference so understood it, as their proceedings will show. In referring to their action in the passage of the new chapter, said

DR. DURBIN. “Do we understand this to be a settlement of this question?”

DR. KINGSLEY. “Yes, so far as I know.”

BISHOP MORRIS. “May it remain so world without end!”

Omnes, (all responding,) “Amen, amen.”

Rev. G. Battelle, in a private letter from the seat of the conference, says, “The leaders on the other side say that they are now willing to let the matter rest in the future.”

THE PAULINE CODE.

I insert for convenient reference and comparison the teachings of the apostles on this subject, that the new chapter may be tested by inspiration:

“Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called. Art thou called being a servant? care not for it: but if thou mayest be made free, use it rather. For he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord’s freeman: likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ’s servant. Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men.” 1 Corinthians vii, 21–23.

“Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ: not with eye-service, as men-pleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; with good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men: knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free. And

ye masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening: knowing that your Master also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with him." Ephesians vi, 5-9.

"Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eye-service, as men-pleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God; and whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ. But he that doeth wrong, shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons." Colossians iii, 22-25.

"Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven." Ephesians iv, 1.

"Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honor, that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed. And they that have believing masters, let them not despise them, because they are brethren; but rather do them service, because they are faithful and beloved, partakers of the benefit. These things teach and exhort." 1 Timothy vi, 1, 2.

"Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless, . . . for men-stealers," etc. 1 Timothy i, 9, 10.

"Exhort servants to be obedient unto their own masters, and to please them well in all things; not answering again; not purloining, but showing all good fidelity; that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things." Titus ii, 9, 10.

"Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward. For this is thank-worthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully." 1 Peter ii, 18, 19.

THE GOLDEN RULE.

"Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets." Matthew vii, 12. "Guided by *justice* and *mercy*, do unto all men as ye would have them to do to you, were your circum-

stances and theirs reversed."—*Dr. Clarke*. "All that you *expect* or *desire* of others in similar circumstances, do to them."—*Albert Barnes*.

THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH ON SLAVERY.

The same principles and advice as contained in the new chapter are held and maintained by the Presbyterian Church, expressed, however, much more fully, and in stronger and more forcible language. (See *The Assembly's Digest*, part xiii, chap. i, sect. 4, page 341. "A full expression of the Assembly's views of slavery in 1818.") It is the action of the highest judicature of the Church, and is binding upon the whole fraternity, being also of "permanent authority and interest." I insert the whole section. It is as follows, namely:

"The Committee to which was referred the resolution on the subject of selling a slave, a member of the Church, and which was directed to prepare a report to be adopted by the Assembly, expressing their opinion in general on the subject of slavery, reported, and their report being read, it was *unanimously* adopted and referred to the same committee for publication."

"It is as follows, namely:

"The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, having taken into consideration the subject of SLAVERY, think proper to make known their sentiments to the Churches and people under their care. We consider the voluntary enslaving of one part of the human race by another as a gross violation of the most precious and sacred rights of human nature, as utterly inconsistent with the law of God, which requires us to love our neighbor as ourselves, and as totally irreconcilable with the spirit and principles of the Gospel of Christ, which enjoin that 'all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.' Slavery creates a paradox in the moral system—it exhibits rational, accountable, and immortal beings in such circumstances as scarcely to leave them the power of moral action. It exhibits them as dependent on the will of others; whether they shall receive religious instruction; whether they shall know and worship the true God; whether they shall enjoy the ordinances of the Gospel; whether they shall perform the

duties and cherish the endearments of husbands and wives, parents and children, neighbors and friends; whether they shall preserve their chastity and purity, or regard the dictates of justice and humanity. Such are some of the consequences of slavery—consequences not imaginary—but which connect themselves with its very existence. The evils to which the slave is *always* exposed often take place in fact, and in their very worst degree and form; and where all of them do not take place, as we rejoice to say that in many instances, through the influence of the principles of humanity and religion on the minds of masters, they do not, still the slave is deprived of his natural right, degraded as a human being, and exposed to the danger of passing into the hands of a master who may inflict upon him all the hardships and injuries which inhumanity and avarice may suggest.

“From this view of the consequences resulting from the practice into which Christian people have most inconsistently fallen, of enslaving a portion of their *brethren* of mankind—for ‘God hath made of one blood all nations of men to dwell on the face of the earth’—it is manifestly the duty of all Christians who enjoy the light of the present day, when the inconsistency of slavery, both with the dictates of humanity and religion, has been demonstrated, and is generally seen and acknowledged, to use their honest, earnest, and unwearied endeavors to correct the errors of former times, and as speedily as possible to efface this blot on our holy religion, and to obtain the complete abolition of slavery throughout Christendom, and, if possible, throughout the whole world.

“We rejoice that the Church to which we belong commenced as early as any other in this country the good work of endeavoring to put an end to slavery, and that in the same work many of its members have ever since been, and now are, among the most active, vigorous, and efficient laborers. We do, indeed, tenderly sympathize with those portions of our Church and our country where the evil of slavery has been entailed upon them, where a *great* and *the most virtuous part of the community* abhor slavery, and wish its extermination as sincerely as any others, but where the number of slaves, their ignorance, and their vicious habits generally, render an immediate and universal emancipation inconsistent, alike with the safety and happiness of the master and

slave. With those who are thus circumstanced we repeat that we tenderly sympathize. At the same time we exhort them to continue, and, if possible, to increase their exertions to effect a total abolition of slavery. We exhort them to suffer no greater delay to take place in this most interesting concern than a regard to the public welfare *truly* and *indispensably* demands.

“As our country has inflicted a most grievous injury upon the unhappy Africans by bringing them into slavery, we can not, indeed, urge that we should add a second injury to the first by emancipating them in such manner as that they will be likely to destroy themselves or others. But we do think that our country ought to be governed in this matter by no other consideration than an honest and impartial regard to the happiness of the injured party, uninfluenced by the expense or inconvenience which such a regard may involve. We, therefore, warn all who belong to our denomination of Christians against unduly extending this plea of necessity, against making it a cover for the love and practice of slavery, or a pretense for not using efforts that are lawful and practicable to extinguish the evil.

“*And we at the same time exhort others* to forbear harsh measures and uncharitable reflections on their brethren who unhappily live among slaves, whom they can not immediately set free, but who at the same time are really using all their influence and all their endeavors to bring them into a state of freedom as soon as a door for it can be safely opened.

“Having thus expressed our views of slavery, and of the duty indispensably incumbent on all Christians to labor for its complete extinction, we proceed to recommend—and we do it with all the earnestness and solemnity which this momentous subject demands—a particular attention to the following points.

“We recommend to all our people to patronize and encourage the society lately formed for colonizing in Africa, the land of their ancestors, the free people of color in our country. We hope that much good may result from the plans and efforts of this society. And while we exceedingly rejoice to have witnessed its origin and organization among the *holders of slaves* as giving an unequivocal pledge of their desire to deliver themselves and their country from the calamity of slavery, we hope that those portions of the American Union whose inhabitants are, by a gra-

cious Providence, more favorably circumstanced, will cordially, and liberally, and earnestly coöperate with their brethren in bringing about the great end contemplated.

"We recommend to all the members of our religious denomination not only to permit but to facilitate and encourage the instruction of their slaves in the principles and duties of the Christian religion by granting them liberty to attend on the preaching of the Gospel when they have the opportunity, by favoring the instruction of them in Sabbath schools wherever those schools can be formed, and by giving them all other proper advantages for acquiring the knowledge of their duty both to God and man. We are perfectly satisfied that, as it is incumbent on all Christians to communicate religious instruction to those who are under their authority, so the doing of this in the case before us, so far from operating, as some have apprehended that it might, as an incitement to insubordination, would, on the contrary, operate as the most powerful means for the prevention of those evils.

"We enjoin it upon all Church Sessions and Presbyteries under the care of this Assembly to discountenance, and, as far as possible, to prevent all cruelty of whatever kind in the treatment of slaves, especially the cruelty of separating husband and wife, parents and children, and that which consists in selling slaves to those who will either themselves deprive these unhappy people of the blessings of the Gospel, or who will transport to places where the Gospel is not proclaimed, or where it is forbidden to slaves to attend upon its institutions. The manifest violation or disregard of the injunction here given in its true spirit and intention, ought to be considered as just ground for the discipline and censure of the Church. And if it shall ever happen that a Christian professor in our communion shall sell a slave who is also in communion and good standing with our Church, contrary to his or her will and inclination, it ought immediately to claim the particular attention of the proper Church judicature; and unless there be such peculiar circumstances attending the case as can but seldom happen, it ought to be followed, without delay, by a suspension of the offender from all the privileges of the Church till he repent and make all the reparation in his power to the injured party."

THE CONCLUSION.

Let the new chapter now be compared with the old one, and with the principles as held by the Church from its foundation; let it be compared with the teachings of the apostles and the Golden Rule, and with the principles as held and maintained by the Presbyterian Church, and I doubt not all the grounds heretofore urged for its rejection will be removed.

And now, if other Churches, with their ample legislation on the subject of slavery, can be regarded as true and loyal citizens, and live without the odium of *abolitionism* being attached to them, why may not the Methodist Episcopal Church, with her but small legislation, be favored with the same regard and respect? She always has been true and loyal, submitting to the civil authorities of our country, and aiding in making and executing its laws.

The Methodist Episcopal Church has a record, in this respect, extending *back* through a whole century, and that record is *untarnished* and without *blemish*.

Her mission is to "spread Scriptural holiness" throughout the earth, and thereby promote the welfare and happiness of all.

To her I am ardently attached. She is the instrument of my salvation. Protected and nurtured in her bosom as my mother more than a quarter of a century, I ought to love her. And as a faithful and dutiful son, how can I forsake her now in the hour of her trial and extremity?

I can not. Till the last loud thunder shake the universe shall not my spirit, I trust, be indifferent to her honor and prosperity.

"For her my tears shall fall;
For her my prayers ascend;
To her my cares and toils be given,
Till toils and cares shall end."

THE END.